



Commonwealth of Kentucky Justice & Public Safety Cabinet

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Kentucky Makes Significant Progress in Battle Against Drug Overdose Deaths

Overdose fatalities declined by nearly 15 percent in 2018

FRANKFORT, Ky. (July 18, 2019) – Kentucky's targeted approach to protecting its citizens from drug overdose deaths has resulted in the first decline since 2013. There were 233 fewer drug fatalities in the Commonwealth during 2018 than there were in 2017.

A report released today by the Kentucky Office of Drug Control Policy indicates lethal overdoses totaled 1,333 in 2018. That is down from an all-time high of 1,566 in 2017. The decline follows years of steady increases in the death toll, driven mostly by a rise in opioid abuse, heroin and fentanyl.

The largest decrease in fatalities occurred in Jefferson County, where 89 fewer Kentucky residents died of overdoses in 2018 as compared to 2017. Kenton, Campbell, Nelson, and Jessamine counties combined to record 63 fewer overdose fatalities than reported the previous year.

"The drug epidemic has taken an incalculable toll on the families and communities of our state and our nation," said Gov. Matt Bevin. "We are extremely grateful to see a significant decline in overdose fatalities, but there is still much work to do. Our Administration will continue our strong partnership with legislators, law enforcement officers and healthcare professionals, as we allocate unprecedented resources to combat this scourge and save lives."

The total number of overdose deaths last fell in 2013 by close to 3 percent. However, the drop in 2018 was by far the largest in at least a decade.

Kentucky's Deadliest Drugs

Fentanyl and fentanyl analogues were the most lethal drug in 2018, contributing to 786 overdose deaths. There was also an increase in deaths attributed to methamphetamine.

Deaths from other controlled substances such as heroin, alprazolam and gabapentin all declined in 2018.

"The numbers are trending down, but our state still faces incredible challenges," said Kentucky Justice and Public Safety Cabinet Secretary John Tilley. "This crisis claimed more than 1,300 lives last year and inflicted untold heartbreak on our families and communities. I only hope the latest numbers serve as evidence that

strong interventions and better access to treatment can and do save lives. We must continue our momentum in these areas, and I pray that all of Kentucky will join together on this front.”

Van Ingram, executive director of the Office of Drug Control Policy, said the overall decline in deaths was the likely result of numerous policy initiatives underway in Kentucky along with a growing awareness about the dangers of opioids and the threat of overdose.

“We’ve pushed hard to develop the most comprehensive approach possible, combining education and treatment with a multitude of other harm-reduction strategies,” Ingram said. “We still have a great deal of work to do, but it’s clear that Kentucky’s efforts are making an impact.”

Kentucky leaders on the federal level also praised the progress.

“Kentucky has sadly been among the states hardest hit by the nationwide opioid and substance abuse epidemic. Now, because of our years-long comprehensive response efforts, our Commonwealth is also helping to lead the recovery,” said Sen. Mitch McConnell. “As Senate Majority Leader, I’ve made the fight to save lives from the horrors of addiction and abuse a top national priority. With an influx of federal resources we’re bolstering Kentucky’s law enforcement and treatment programs in meaningful ways. Gov. Bevin has been an important leader in this effort as well. The results of our work at the federal and state level with our many local partners on the front lines are evident in today’s announcement. But this report is also an opportunity to recommit ourselves to reducing and preventing future overdoses and helping Kentuckians maintain long-term recovery.”

“As a career physician, I’ve always believed that there is no one-size-fits all solution to the opioid epidemic and that it will take a combination of efforts at the federal, state, and local levels to address this crisis,” said Sen. Rand Paul. “I’ve been proud to lead the fight for making expanded treatment options available to more Kentuckians struggling with drug addiction and ensure the federal government isn’t standing in the way of our recovery efforts. While we still have much work ahead of us on this issue, I am truly encouraged by today’s news on the decline in opioid related deaths. It serves as an important reminder of what can be done when we all work together to solve our biggest problems, and I look forward to continuing to advocate in Washington on behalf of all Kentuckians.”

“Every life saved from the opioid crisis is worth celebrating. The decline in overdose deaths is a testament that the joint efforts of law enforcement, treatment and education in Kentucky are working,” said Congressman Hal Rogers, who founded Operation UNITE to battle the epidemic in Eastern Kentucky in 2003. “Thanks to joint federal, state and local efforts, we are connecting more individuals and families with the resources they need to prevent and treat drug abuse. We still have work to do, but I’m very proud that Operation UNITE, Eastern Kentucky and the entire Commonwealth are leading the national charge to save lives and turn back the tide on the opioid epidemic.”

“The 2018 report reflects that we are making progress to combat opioid fatalities in Kentucky,” said Congressman James Comer. “And while we still have much more progress to make, I’m encouraged to see the many programs and policy initiatives coming out of the Commonwealth that have certainly helped influence this nearly 15 percent decline. I’ve likewise made it a priority of mine on the federal level to strongly support initiatives that will serve those on the front lines battling this crisis in communities back home.”

“This is evidence that our efforts to combat the opioid crisis are working. Further, it emphasizes that we must continue our fight,” said Congressman Andy Barr. “I join Gov. Bevin in his commitment to battling this epidemic, and have made it my priority in Congress to secure essential federal funding and resources for Kentucky’s Sixth District. Through the passage of legislation like the SUPPORT Act, which included my bill the CAREER Act to provide funding for transitional housing, the 21st Century Cures Act, the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act and the designation of High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas, we have made

historic investments in combating the opioid crisis. There is still work to be done, but I will continue to work with my colleagues in the federal delegation and Gov. Bevin to help those affected by this epidemic.”

“There is no doubt that the nationwide opioid crisis is hitting Kentucky especially hard, but I am encouraged that the 2018 fatality numbers show a decrease,” said Congressman Brett Guthrie. “We must continue the fight to help Kentuckians see relief from this crisis. I commend Gov. Bevin for his work to combat the opioid epidemic and I will continue to work on the federal level to stop this epidemic from destroying Kentucky communities.”

Attacking the Problem is Effective

Over the past three and a half years, the Bevin Administration has made attacking the opioid crisis a top priority, advancing a series of programs and policy initiatives to improve access to treatment and save lives.

In 2017, the Kentucky Justice and Public Safety Cabinet partnered with Operation UNITE to create the KY Help Call Center, which provides information on treatment options and open slots among treatment providers. Those with a substance use disorder – or their friends or family members – may call 1-833-8KY-HELP (1-833-859-4357) and speak one-on-one to a specialist who will connect them with treatment as quickly as possible.

The administration also joined with the Kentucky Injury Prevention and Research Center (KIPRC) at the University of Kentucky College of Public Health to launch FindHelpNowKY.org. The site provides a search engine for drug treatment, helping users locate treatment providers based on location, facility type, and category of treatment needed.

In 2018, Kentucky State Police launched the Angel Initiative. Anyone suffering from a substance use disorder can now visit a KSP post and be paired with a local officer who will assist with locating an appropriate treatment program.

Meanwhile, the Kentucky Department of Corrections (DOC) is undertaking a comprehensive overhaul of substance abuse programming. The move will expand the system to include every possible treatment modality available, offering additional tools and options for clinicians and inmates. DOC is hiring additional treatment clinicians to provide services both inside and outside prison walls, and is providing dedicated treatment staff at Probation and Parole offices.

Gov. Bevin and the General Assembly have significantly increased funding for the state’s drug response efforts, allocating a record \$79 million over the past two budget cycles.

The Governor and lawmakers also collaborated on House Bill 333, which limits opioid prescriptions for acute pain to a three-day supply unless a doctor provides written justification for a larger amount.

In April, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) awarded more than \$87 million for Kentucky CAN HEAL (Communities and Networks Helping End Addiction Long-term) – a partnership between the University of Kentucky’s Center on Drug and Alcohol Research (CDAR), the Cabinet for Health and Family Services and the Justice and Public Safety Cabinet. The project will fund a comprehensive four-year study aimed at reducing opioid overdose deaths by 40 percent in 16 counties that represent more than one-third of Kentucky’s population.

In addition, strong partnerships with federal law enforcement, including collaboration with U.S. Attorneys Rob Duncan and Russell Coleman and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), have contributed to the progress Kentucky is making in combatting the drug epidemic.

Largest decline in resident, drug-related fatalities by county:

1) Jefferson County	89
2) Kenton County	24
3) Campbell County	14
4) Nelson County	13
5) Jessamine County	12

Most resident, overdose deaths by county: (age adjusted, per capita)

1) Boyd County	60
2) Madison County	57
3) Kenton County	56
4) Clark County	51
5) Campbell County	49

Most resident, heroin-related overdose deaths by county:

1) Jefferson County	84
2) Fayette County	36
3) Kenton County	14
4) Boyd County	7
5) Campbell County	6

Most resident, fentanyl-related deaths by county:

1) Jefferson County	229
2) Fayette County	117
3) Kenton County	71
4) Boone County	39
5) Campbell County	32

The 2018 Overdose Fatality Report was compiled with data from the Kentucky Medical Examiner's Office, the Kentucky Injury Prevention & Research Center and the Kentucky Office of Vital Statistics.